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ABSTRACT

Preparation for productive employment in a global economy is one aspect of National Education Goals 3 and 5. Career education can help people realize the opportunities and meet the challenges of the international workplace. The emergence of flexible, information-based technologies is a primary factor in the evolution of the global economy. New market standards, electronic communications, and emphasis on work teams are changing the competitive framework and the content of many jobs. In addition to technical skills, workers will need an array of interpersonal skills, competence in intercultural communication, and appreciation of different cultures. Competing on a global level requires a global mindset--the ability to look at the broader context, deal with ambiguity, trust processes rather than structure, and strive for continuous self-development. The content and focus of career education and development are changing in a global context. Although familiar components such as self-knowledge, occupational exploration, and job search skills remain important, the ability to take personal responsibility for career development and to set career competencies in the larger context is essential. Ability to locate information is becoming necessary both to find a job and to do a job. Workers will need assistance in new areas: undertaking career negotiation; adjusting to downsizing, mergers, and underemployment; helping families adjust to relocation; and reassessing the meaning of work. (Contains 13 references.) (SK)

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Career Education for a Global Economy

by Sandra Kerka

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The "new economic order" is a global one. Policymakers, educators, business, and industry are all concerned with strengthening the United States for competition in this new arena. National Education Goals 3 and 5 both mention preparing people for further learning and productive employment in the modern global economy. Career education has generally focused on helping people understand the relationship between education and work and acquire employability skills. Now people need assistance in realizing the opportunities and meeting the challenges of the international workplace. What is the global economy? What skills will people need to participate in it? How can a refocused career education contribute to educational reform and competitiveness? These questions are explored in this ***ERIC Digest.***

The Global Scene

The evolving global economy is based on a number of factors (Herr 1990): decreasing transportation and communications costs, new political structures and economic alliances (such as the European Community, North American Free Trade Agreement), and homogenization of tastes influenced by media and travel. The most important influence is the emergence of flexible, information-based technologies (Carnevale 1991). Profound economic and social changes are creating new market standards (productivity, quality, variety, customization, convenience, timeliness) and integrating producers and consumers into networks for delivering goods and services globally or locally. Meeting these standards requires great changes in organizational structures, skill needs, and jobs.

According to Carnevale, competitive organizations will be characterized by productivity, flexibility, speed, affordable quality, and customer focus. Many organizations will emphasize closely integrated work groups, teamwork, and shared information. The need for certain types of workers is being reduced or eliminated. At the same time, freer movement of some workers across national borders is escalating (Herr 1990); other workers may engage in "electronic immigration," interacting through telecommunications with their employers in other countries.

The global economy will influence people's lives whether or not they are employed in international firms. In the new economy, nations compete not only with each other's economic systems, but also with each other's research and development and educational systems. Global events affect domestic economies.

Other characteristics of work in the new economy also have implications for career development (Carnevale 1991). Managers will become brokers/facilitators; there will be more technical specialists, more lateral entry, and shorter, flatter career ladders. Instead of the old-style division of labor into discrete tasks, job functions will converge, and work teams will consist of individuals who alternate expert, brokering, and leadership roles. Rewards will be based more on the performance of teams and networks.

Skills for the New Economy

The new competitive framework requires a broader set of skills; "hard" (technical) and "soft" (interpersonal and communication) skills are equally important (Carnevale 1991). The skills identified by a number of authors (Carnevale 1991; Herr 1990; Rhinesmith 1991a,b, 1992) include managing information, resources, and relationships with people as well as self-management. The starting point, of course, is basic skills: reading, writing, computation, and, most important, ability to learn continuously throughout life. In addition, "global" workers need flexibility, problem-solving and decision-making ability, adaptability, creative thinking, self-motivation, and the capacity for reflection.

Even if they do not themselves relocate, workers will likely deal with people from other nations in their own workplaces or electronically. Dealing with other people in a diverse local as well as international context requires intercultural communication, teamwork, negotiation, conflict resolution, as well as complementarity—the ability to facilitate the work of others (Herr 1990). In order to work with or supervise people from different cultures, workers need awareness of different values, cultural norms, and world views. Foreign language skills are becoming essential career skills (Rodamar 1991). Knowledge of the culture, history, politics, and legal and economic systems of other nations will be important for many jobs. Workers will also need to adjust attitudes, such as reassessing standards of success as career paths change and career ladders flatten or disappear (Walker 1992).

As companies recruit, select, train, and promote on a global scale from a global labor pool, workers need, in addition to a set of skills, a global mindset (Rhinesmith 1992). People with global mindsets have the ability to look at the broader context, accept contradiction and ambiguity, trust processes rather than structure, value diversity and teamwork, view change as opportunity, and strive for continuous self-development.

The Role of Career Education and Development

Until now, issues of career choice, work preparation, and occupational information have been addressed in a national context (Herr 1990). The shift to a global context changes the content and focus of career education and development. Employment security is becoming "employability security" (Kanter 1991, p. 9)—the knowledge that one has the competencies demanded in the new economy and the ability to expand and adjust those competencies as requirements change.

To some extent, the familiar content of career education is still important: self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, goal development, job search competencies such as resume writing and interviewing skills, career and personal development planning. More than ever, however, the ability to take personal responsibility for one's career development is essential. In addition, career educators must help people set these career competencies within the wider global context.

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Because traditional assumptions about career development will pertain only to a few workers, Zwerling (1992) advocates a curriculum that centers on the generic skills needed at different career stages. He outlines a comprehensive program that identifies the psychic tasks, events, and preferred learning styles and formats of each life stage and suggests programming related to the life and career planning needs of each stage.

Occupational information, a vital component of career education, can be bewildering as the quantity, distribution, and quality of jobs change continuously in the new economy. In an information age, the ability to locate information is necessary both to find a job and to do a job. People must be equipped with mental maps of how the new labor market works (Wegmann et al. 1989). Skill in processing the information acquired, including critical reasoning skills to select and evaluate the most relevant information, is also essential (Jarvis 1990). The questions Ettinger (1991) suggests to guide career decision making need to be reconsidered in a global context:

- How will consumer behavior affect opportunities in this field?
- What public policies will affect this career?
- How many already work in this field and how many will be needed in the future?
- Where are these opportunities located?
- What will the work environment be like?
- How will technology change this field?

According to Bailyn (1992), "the traditional system is geared to matching an individual to a job that has been carefully defined independently of the person filling it" (p. 381). In the global economy, jobs may be shaped more by the qualities of those performing them and status and compensation may be attached to people, not positions. Therefore, career educators need to help people become individual career negotiators and to rethink work and career to identify how they can contribute to an organization according to their abilities and personal circumstances (ibid.).

Herr (1990) recognizes a number of psychological issues for which workers must be prepared in the face of potential mergers, downsizing, relocation, and constant change. Adjustment is the key word: helping people assess the meaning of work, prepare for retraining, cope with uncertainty, and possibly deal with a move to "a less satisfying and less well-paying job for which life satisfactions and rewards will need to be found in roles and opportunities outside the work force" (p. 157). Those who relocate will need help in adjusting to living and working in a different culture, as well as helping their families make the transition, a new dimension of the work-family issue.

A number of the skills needed for work in the global economy are reflected in current curricular emphases such as development of critical thinking skills, tech prep, the integration of vocational and academic education, and the competencies of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. Career educators can collaborate with vocational and academic educators and employers in documenting the need for these skills and infusing them in a multidisciplinary approach. As Zwerling (1992) puts it, "the best *liberal* education may come to be seen as career education; the best *career* education may be seen to be liberal education" (p. 108). The challenges of the global economy are an opportunity not only for work organizations to redesign themselves across national borders, but also for education to transcend its traditional boundaries and reenvision ways to prepare people for life and for work.

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